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ABSTRACT

The family is only one sub-system in the total society. It is closely related to other sub-systems at work in the whole society: the educational system, the market economy, the state apparatus, the cultural system, which works through the media and the school. The data given in this paper indicate that it will be very difficult to change the occupational status of women until their occupational motivations are altered. But this would require that various sub-systems, such as the family, not converge to lower the level aspiration of women concerning their occupational status and that they do not inculcate the idea in both sexes that there are sex-typed roles in occupations, domestic work and child training.
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FAMILY SUB-SYSTEM AND SEX ROLES IN THE WORK SITUATION

by

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FAMILY SUB-SYSTEM AND SEX ROLES IN THE WORK SITUATION

The sex role distribution in the family, in employment and in society is one aspect of the whole social structure: this distribution permits one to divide societies into different categories. For instance, Margaret Mead has divided the different tribes in Melanesia according to the sex role distribution in the family and the occupational milieu (1). According to a certain sociological tradition extending from Spencer to Durkheim and Parsons, specialization is the best way to integrate the different parts of the whole. For Durkheim, the division of occupations among people which is a characteristic of the industrial society permits modern societies to abandon the mechanic solidarity of pre-industrial society and to attain the organic solidarity which is the most stable form of social integration(2). For Parsons, Robert Bales and Morris Zelditch, sex role division in the family is the best way to achieve integration of members of the family group into this unit and integration of the family into the social system (3). However, the "organic solidarity" built on the division of work in industrial societies did not prevent disturbances within industrial societies (strikes, racial riots, etc...) and among different industrial societies (world wars, accompanied by the largest genocides in history). In like manner, the sex role divisions in the family did not diminish, the discontent of women victimized by inequalitarian sex role distribution. Consequently authors such as Marx, who predicted disasters among different nations and wars opposing different social classes because of an hierarchical division of labor (4), and Simone de Beauvoir, who predicts discontent of women because of the division of roles along sexual lines in the family and the society, seem to be better prophets than Spencer, Durkheim and Talcott Parsons (5). But to take a stand between these two divergent kinds of theories is not the purpose of this paper.

The purpose of my paper is to explore the following problematic: Starting from the fact that there is a marked division of labor between men and women in the occupational milieu, a division associated with the absence of women in high positions, and low qualifications and salaries attributed to working women, I suggest that this sex role distribution in the working milieu is reinforced, if not instigated, by such sub-systems of the society as: the market economy, the state apparatus, the family and the school system. In this paper, I will summarize the relationship of the contemporary nuclear family with the sex divisions in the work situation as an example of the participation of one social sub-system in these sex divisions. If the paper is focused primarily on this aspect, it does not mean that a one-way relationship is envisaged. On the contrary, I am convinced that a circular causation exists between sex role distributions at work and sex role

maintenance in the family and in other social sub-systems. If the young child is already prepared for the sex role division at work by the role distribution in the family; conversely, segregation of the sexes at work reinforces the sex-role division in the family.

NUCLEAR FAMILY SUB-SYSTEM AND SEX ROLE IN THE WORK SITUATION

The thesis has been expressed that between the market economy system and the nuclear family (sub-system) there is a contract (1). On one hand the market economy gives the husband a job and a salary which permits the reproductive function of the family while the job and the salary of the woman are considered as subsidiary work and salary. This means that jobs are given to women according to the needs of the economic system and that they are not considered as employed on a continuous basis with the right to a career and a full salary. On the other hand, the nuclear family subscribes to this contract with the market economy and assists the market economy in maintaining the sex role divisions at work (6).

We will identify the various means used by the family to maintain the sex role divisions in the society. The nuclear family uses three principal devices to maintain the sex role divisions in the work situation:

- . The maintenance of the traditional sex role in the couple
- . The socialization of children according to sex
- . The occupational orientation of children according to sex

SEX ROLE DIVISION AT WORK AND IN THE FAMILY

Although changes are occurring in that young married women with small children are more frequently employed than in the past, the patterns of the majority of nuclear families in the market economy are based on a sexual division: the husband is "the head" of the family and his main function is to provide the family income. He assumes what Parsons calls the instrumental role. The woman is the homemaker, the housewife and the educator of the children. She exerts the expressive role according to Parsons. Even if these patterns are more and more contested by young families, they tend to maintain the idea that the man should have an elevated salary while the wife's salary is merely a subsidiary contribution to the family needs. A certain number of employed women have internalized this perspective and indicate that they are satisfied when they receive a mediocre salary in comparison with men's salaries. They say: "it is not too bad for a woman". Furthermore, they continue in the work milieu the sex role divisions

of the family: if the child is ill, they assume that it is their role to remain at home in order to care for it; they also think that every matter which concerns the children: health, school, relationships within the peer group, etc...is their responsibility. All this contributes to the lowering of their motivation for a career, serves to justify their frequent absence from work and upholds the point of view of their employers that women workers are merely subsidiary workers for subsidiary jobs and thus worth of only subsidiary salaries.

SEX ROLE DIVISION AT WORK AND SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN BY THE FAMILY

The socialization of children is the second device used by the family to contribute to the maintenance of sexual divisions at work. This socialization is done through four educational processes: The first one is the identification process, which uses subtle mechanisms in order to induce children to adopt a sex type identity. For example, in the French culture, one of the most efficient identification processes consists of praising the strength of boys and their ability to suppress their emotions. This same identification process consists of praising femininity and coquetry in the young girl, and of encouraging her to take care of her hair and clothes, etc.... Two other subtle mechanisms are used by mothers to teach children that their behavior should be sex-typed: manipulation and canalization. Manipulations have been observed in the mothers of children aged from one to five in 22 families. According to Ruth Hartley the following manipulations are sex-typed: the mother's tendency to fuss with the baby girl's hair. Such "moulding or manipulation has an enduring effect because the child subsumes the mother's view of her (as pretty, as feminine) in her own concept of herself" (7). Another manipulation is seen in the difference in maternal treatment of boy and girl babies: "mothers appear to treat boys with respect for their autonomy, following the baby's own rhythm and adopting a 'come and get it' attitude. Girls are more hovered over and fiddled with, on the lines of mother knows best" (8). By such action the family underlines the sex-typed behavior and characteristics which are desired by employers for the maintenance of sexual divisions in the labor force: employers like pretty girls in the office and praise obedience and submissiveness from women workers while they expect initiative and autonomy from their male counter-parts (9).

"Canalization: is the third process: "it involves directing the attention of male and female children to particular objects or aspects of objects. Sex differentiated toys, for example, are an early feature of the child's world, and the opportunity to play with them (and to be rewarded for playing with them in the appropriate way) lays a basis for the adult's pleasure in the things

these toys represent" (10). Research recently conducted on working women reveals a complaint of employers concerning the fact that they cannot give mechanical work to women because they lack "mechanical ability". We know that parents give their boys mechanical toys (cars, trucks, erector and meccano sets, etc...) which develop their mechanical abilities; whereas, they deprive girls of these toys, the latter being provided with dolls, miniature washing machines and cooking sets, etc. The sex typed division of labor is thus already prepared in the family by the attribution of toys to children according to their sex.

Sex role "modeling" is the forth process by which the family develops sex identity in the children and prepares them for different functions at work. Sex role modeling can act by two mechanisms. The first one is "activity exposure". When children of both sexes perceive that the father is absent because he works outside of the home while the mothers remain at home for domestic chores and child training, they learn that external occupational life is socially accepted for men while social acceptance for women is associated with the domestic and educational roles carried out in the home. However the most efficient mechanism for inculcating sex role behavior in children is the "sex type activity demand" from the parents; researches conducted in American, French and Polish families indicate that in these countries (so different in economy and culture), parents make demands according to the sex of their children. These sex associated "activity demands" tend to perpetuate the sex role division at work and in the family. For instance, in a small provincial town in France, the data show the 80% of the young girls, but only 42% of the boys, participate in domestic tasks at home (11). In a national sample of French youth, Agnès Pitrou found that 29% of the young girls, but only 7% of the boys assist with the cooking. 47% of the girls, but only 24% of the boys help with the house cleaning. 16% of the girls, but only 1% of the boys help with the laundry. 23% of the girls, but only 1% of the boys assist with the ironing. 14% of the girls but only 4% of the boys aid with the care of younger sisters and brothers etc... (12). It is only in assisting with household repairs that boys surpass girls. Results of this same nature have also been obtained in Poland (13).

We can explain this sex-typed behavior among young people only by means of the "sex-typed activity exposure" and the "sex-typed activity demands" that parents practice in their relationships with children. This contributes to the creation of the "double role for the future working woman: i.e. develops among children the ideology that housework is a feminine job and that consequently the working woman should assume a double role from which the man is spared. This behavior on the part of parents tends to lower the level of aspiration of their daughters concerning

employment as the "double role" can be adequately fulfilled only if working women decrease their commitments at work. A high commitment at work cannot be maintained over a long period when the social consensus inculcated by the family deems that the working woman is the person responsible primarily for the children's training and the household tasks.

SEX ROLE DIVISIONS AT WORK AND OCCUPATIONAL ORIENTATION OF CHILDREN BY THE FAMILY

Research data indicate that the family is one of the main agents responsible for the low level of aspiration of girls concerning occupational choices.

Although French data indicate that there is a general deficiency of the family in relation to the occupational orientation of the children, this deficiency is greatest where the occupational future of the girl is concerned.

In French high and middle social stratas, boys are pushed by their parents to choose occupational training or an educational level which will reward them either with prestige or money. However if their sisters go to a university, it is mainly to specialize in "feminine" courses (or subjects considered to be principally interesting to women such as literature, language, etc...). These women are so unprepared that they cannot expect to find a job or at least not a well-paying job.

In the low middle-class and the working class, boys are sent to a university or technical school with a suggestion from the parents that they learn a "good occupation". If there is not enough money for the children's education, girls will be sent directly to work and will be asked to sacrifice the continuation of their education for the sake of their brothers. If they are sent to technical school it is generally to gain skill in occupations which are "feminine" and, according to the parents, will prepare them for marriage (e.g. sewing). However, even if they obtain a diploma in a technical school after 3 years of education, most of them will be hired in electronics where their diploma will not be considered an occupational qualification, even if their abilities, acquired by the learning of sewing, develop their manual skills and allow them to attain a high rhythm at work.

René König from the University of Cologne has compared the occupational status of young girls belonging to nuclear families to the occupational status of girls from one-parent families (most of them being the families of widows). He found that the occupational status of young girls with a widowed mother was much higher than the occupational status of young girls from nuclear families. This may be explained in two ways. First, the widowed mothers have experienced the economic difficulties of women without sufficient

occupational training who receive low salaries, and they encourage their daughters to learn an occupation more often than mother of a nuclear family because the latter envisage the breadwinner role as a male one. Secondly, the girl reared by a widowed mother has not identified with the image of the woman who is passive and exerts the expressive and domestic role at home while renouncing outside employment.

EFFICIENCY OF THE INCULCATION BY THE FAMILY OF SEX TYPED IDENTIFICATION AND SEX ROLES IN THE WORK SITUATION

The above data indicate that the family is one of the sub-systems which contributes most in inculcating sex role identity and sex typed roles in children from infancy through childhood and adolescence. Other data indicate that sex role identification and sex role modeling (or sex role training in the family) are effective in influencing children and have an impact on their future occupational life.

In the United States, Leonore Weitzman has summarized the results of American observations and research on sex role identification among young children. She indicates that the child entering nursery school is already able to determine the sex roles and to express his (her) preference for one sex. Boys identify themselves with masculine roles and girls with feminine roles. Boys have thus learned roles appropriate to their own sex and girls have learned feminine roles (15). Ruth Hartley found that at four, children already know that the main feminine role is that of housewife and that the main masculine role is that of breadwinner for the family. Furthermore, boys and girls learn the characteristics of each sex: they learn that boys are active and efficient and that girls are passive and emotional. They learn also that boys are more highly valued than girls (16). In addition, Mischel and Grusec found that children learn the elements of observed behavior even when they are the objects of hostility and thus experience the negative consequences of this behavior (17). These data indicate that girls learn, in the family, the passive behavior which will constitute an obstacle to their promotion in occupational life.

In Canada, Robert Lambert has released data which indicate that, first of all; there is a positive relationship between the parental role differentiation and the children's differentiated attitude concerning sex roles; secondly, that powerful boys tend to have segregative attitudes in their families more frequently than boys to which parents grant less power, the inverse correlation was found for girls; third, children who experience different interaction with adults according to sex tend to think according to sex role differentiation concepts (18).

All these data show that the attitudes and behavior of children are strongly influenced by the sex role differentiation inculcated by the parents in daily family life. What is the specific impact of this influence on the future occupational roles? Some experiments conducted in the U.S.A. and Canada give data showing the powerful impact of the sex role inculcation by the family and the school on the occupation preference of children.

In Canada, Barty gave children aged 10 to 13 of both sexes in a primary school, two pictures, one representing a nurse, the second a woman doctor. She asked the children which career they preferred to follow as adults: 70% of the girls answered that they would choose to become a nurse while 80% of the boys responded that they would choose to become a doctor (19). Although in this experiment we cannot isolate the respective influences of the family and school on occupational preferences of children according to sex it seems that the family is particularly efficient when it practices "sex typed activity demands" and "sex typed exposure", either in giving girls miniature nurses kits or in indicating to a boy that prestige and money are related to a medical career and that they would be proud if he could become a doctor. Even if there is no direct reference to careers, the family has developed a very low level of aspiration in the daughter and high level of aspiration in the boy, which seem to have influenced the preferences of both sexes in the Canadian experiment.

Another experiment conducted in the U.S. shows that the combination of the influence of the family and the school has developed a fear of success among girls. Horner gave her female students (first and second year at the university) the following test to complete with a story of their own: "after her first year at the university, Ann was at the head of her class". The same test was given to male students but the name used was masculine. Horner found that 65% of the female students but only 10% of the male students wrote a story in which motivation was given to avoid success (20).

While boys expressed their satisfaction concerning masculine success, the stories written by girls indicated feelings of hostility, bitterness and ambivalence concerning Ann's success. Some of them said that Ann should abandon her career for marriage. Other research of Horner indicates that the fear of success increases among girls between junior and senior high school, and goes up progressively between the first and last year at the university. This seems to indicate that the fear increases when girls have to choose their educational and occupational future, either at the end of secondary school or after graduation from the university. Barty conducted the same experiment as Horner with the same results. She added that female anxiety related to success is equally high whether the success concerns "feminine" or "masculine" careers (21).

There is a very high probability that the family is the first social sub-system which inculcates in girls a low level of aspiration concerning their position at work. To the extent that the nuclear family inculcates in girls the idea that there are "feminine" and "masculine" occupations, that it rewards emotional and passive attitudes among girls and initiative and instrumental attitudes among boys, that it inculcates the idea that women should fulfill a double role and are the main persons responsible for housework and child training, women will have a low level of aspiration concerning career choices and they will continue to encounter discrimination, low salaries and low status in the work situation.

The family is only one social sub-system in the total society. It is closely related to the other sub-systems at work in the whole society: the educational system, the market economy, the state apparatus, the cultural system, which works through the mass media, and the content of the education received in the schools, etc.... The data given above indicate that it will be very difficult to change the occupational status of women until their occupational motivations are altered. But this would require that various sub-systems such as the family, the school, the market economy, the state and the cultural system, not converge to lower the level of aspiration of women concerning their status in the occupational world and that they not inculcate the idea in both sexes that there are sex typed roles in occupations, in domestic work and in child training. Even if it requires a long time to effect this "mental revolution" in the entire society, there is indication that a mental revolution is already affecting young university and professional women, i.e. women who are the most able to influence the future in consequence of their present social position or their potential position in the future.

Notes to Michel's article

- (1) Margaret Mead: Moeurs et Sexualité en Océanie, Paris: Plon.
- (2) Durkheim: De la division du travail social, Paris: Alcan, 1902 (2e édition).
- (3) Talcoot Parsons, R.F. Bales: Family, Socialization and Interaction Process, New-York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1955.
- (4) Simone de Beauvoir: Le Deuxième Sexe, Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- (5) Dorothy Smith: "Women, the Family and Corporate Capitalism", in Women in Canada, edited by Marylee Stephenson, New Press, Toronto 1973.
- (6) Ibidem.
- (7) Quoted from Ann Oakley: Sex, Gender and Society, London, Maurice Temple Smith, 1972, pg 175.
- (8) Ibidem, pg 174.
- (9) Andrée Michel: Emploi féminin et société, ouvrage en préparation.
- (10) Ann Oakley: opus cité, pg 175.
- (11) Jacques Sabran: Non aux villes tentaculaires. Etude sociologique de jeunes citadins à Gardanne. La petite patrie retrouvée. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973.
- (12) Agnès Pitrou: La famille dans la vie de tous les jours, Toulouse, Privat, 1972.
- (13) Jerzy Piotrowski: "The employment of married women and the changing sex roles in Poland", in A. Michel (éditeur): Family Issues of Employed Women in Europe and America, Leyde, Brill, 1971.
- (14) René König: "Problèmes du choix professionnel des jeunes filles de familles incomplètes", in Studies in the Family,
- (15) Lenore Weitzman: "Sex roles socialization in picture books for preschool children", American Journal of Sociology, volume 77, No. 6 (with Eiffer, Hokada et Ross)
- (16) Quoted by L. Weitzman in the same article,
- (17) Walther Mischel: "A social learning view of sex differences in behavior", in E. MacCoby: The development of sex differences, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966.
- (18) Robert Lambert: Sex Roles Imagery in Children: Social Origin of Mind, Studies of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, Ottawa, 1971.
- (19) Barty: Fear of Success, non-published dissertation, British Columbia University, 1971, quoted in Women in Canada, (M. Stephenson, editor), Toronto: New Press.
- (20) M. Horner: "Fail Bright Women", Psychology Today, 3-6, Nov. 1969 pg 36-39.
- (21) Barty: Ibidem.